Queer studies

Queer studies, **sexual diversity studies**, or **LGBT studies** is the study of issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity usually focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, queer, questioning, intersex people and cultures.[1]

Originally centered on LGBT history and literary theory, the field has expanded to include the academic study of issues raised in biology, sociology, anthropology, the history of science,[2] philosophy, psychology, sexology, political science, ethics, and other fields by an examination of the identity, lives, history, and perception of queer people. Marianne LaFrance, the former chair of the Larry Kramer Initiative for Lesbian and Gay Studies at Yale University,[3] says, "Now we're asking not just 'What causes homosexuality?' [but also] 'What causes heterosexuality?' and 'Why is sexuality so central in some people's perspective?'"[3]

Queer studies is not the same as queer theory, which is an analytical viewpoint within queer studies (centered on literary studies and philosophy) that challenges the putatively "socially constructed" categories of sexual identity.[2]

Founding scholar of the discipline, the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

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Background

Though a new discipline, a growing number of colleges have begun offering academic programs related to sex, sexuality, and sexual orientation.[4] There are currently over 40 certificate and degree granting programs with at least five institutions in the United States offering an undergraduate major; a growing number of similar courses are offered in countries other than the United States.

Professor Kevin Floyd has argued that the formative arguments for Marxism and those that have been the basis for queer theory should be reformulated to examine the dissociation of sexuality from gender at the beginning of the twentieth century in terms of reification, and to claim that this dissociation is one aspect of a larger dynamic of social "reification" enforced by capitalism.[5]

History

Early academic study of queer community include lesbian researcher Mildred Berryman's 1930's groundbreaking[6]:897–898[7] *The Psychological Phenomena of the Homosexual*[8]:223,228 on 23 lesbian women and 9 gay men, whom she met through the Salt Lake City Bohemian Club.[9][10][11]:66 In the study most lesbian women and gay men (many of whom had Mormon background)[12][13][14] reported experiencing erotic interest in others of the same sex since childhood,[8]:120,222 and exhibited self-identity and community identity[15] as sexual minorities.[8]:222 During the 1920s gay and lesbian subcultures were beginning to

become more established in several larger US cities.[16] Lesbian and gay studies originated in the 1970s with the publication of several "seminal works of gay history. Inspired by ethnic studies, women's studies, and similar identity-based academic fields influenced by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, the initial emphasis was on "uncovering the suppressed history of gay and lesbian life;" it also made its way into literature departments, where the emphasis was on literary theory.[2] Queer theory soon developed, challenging the "socially constructed" categories of sexual identity.[2]

The first undergraduate course in the United States on LGBTQ studies was taught at the University of California, Berkeley in the spring of 1970.[17] It was followed by similar courses in the fall of 1970 at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL).[17] The UNL course, taught by Louis Crompton, led to the introduction in the state legislature of a bill (eventually defeated) which would have banned all discussion of homosexuality in that state's universities and colleges.[17]

According to Harvard University, the City University of New York began the first university program in gay and lesbian studies in 1986.[4][18] The City College of San Francisco claims to be the "First Queer Studies Department in the U.S.,"[19] with English instructor Dan Allen developing one of the first gay literature courses in the country in Fall 1972, and the college establishing what it calls "the first Gay and Lesbian Studies Department in the United States" in 1989.[19] Then-department chair Jonathan David Katz was the first tenured faculty in queer studies in the country.[3] Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate New York were among the first to offer a full-fledged major in LGBTQ Studies in the late 1990s and currently has one of the few tenure lines specifically in a stand-alone LGBT Studies program as a period when many are being absorbed into Women and Gender Studies programs.

Historians John Boswell and Martin Duberman made Yale University a notable center of lesbian and gay studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[2] Each historian published several books on gay history; Boswell held three biennial conferences on the subject at the university, and Duberman sought to establish a center for lesbian and gay studies there in 1985.[2] However, Boswell died in 1994, and in 1991 Duberman left for the City University of New York, where he founded its Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies.[2] A 1993 alumnus gift evolved into the faculty committee-administered Fund for Lesbian and Gay Studies, which developed a listing of courses relevant to lesbian and gay studies called the "Pink Book" and established a small lending library named for Boswell. The committee began to oversee a series of one-year visiting professorships in 1994.[2]

Yale–Kramer controversy

In 1997, writer and AIDS activist Larry Kramer offered his alma mater Yale $4 million (and his personal papers) to endow a permanent, tenured professorship in gay studies, and possibly build a gay and lesbian student center.[18][20] His requirements were specific, as Yale was to use the money solely for "1) the study of and/or instruction in gay male literature..." including a tenured position, "and/or 2) the establishment of a gay student center at Yale..."[18]

With gender, ethnic and race-related studies still relatively new, then-Yale provost Alison Richard said that gay and lesbian studies was too narrow a specialty for a program in perpetuity,[18] indicating a wish to compromise on some of the conditions Kramer had asserted.[18] Negotiations broke down as Kramer, frustrated by what he perceived to be "homophobic" resistance, condemned the university in a front-page story in *The New York Times*.[18][20] According to Kramer, he subsequently received letters from more than 100 institutions of higher learning "begging me to consider them."[18]

In 2001, Yale accepted a $1 million grant from his older brother, money manager Arthur Kramer, to establish the Larry Kramer Initiative for Lesbian and Gay Studies.[2][21] The 5-year program aimed to bring in visiting faculty, host conferences and lectures, and coordinate academic endeavors in lesbian and gay studies.[2][21] Jonathan David Katz assumed the role of executive coordinator in 2002; in 2003 he commented that while women's studies or African American studies have been embraced by American universities, lesbian and gay studies have not.[2] He blamed institutionalised fear of alienating alumni of private universities, or legislators who fund public ones.[2] The Larry Kramer Initiative ended in 2006.

In June 2009, Harvard University announced that it will establish an endowed chair in LGBT studies.[4][18][22] Believing the post to be "the first professorship of its kind in the country,"[18] Harvard President Drew G. Faust called it “an important milestone.”[4][22] Funded by a $1.5 million gift from the members and supporters of the Harvard Gay & Lesbian Caucus,[23] the F. O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship of Gender and Sexuality is named for a mid-20th century gay Harvard American studies scholar and literary

critic[4][22] who chaired the undergraduate program in history and literature.[4] Harvard Board of Overseers member Mitchell L. Adams said, “This is an extraordinary moment in Harvard’s history and in the history of this rapidly emerging field ... And because of Harvard’s leadership in academia and the world, this gift will foster continued progress toward a more inclusive society.”[4]

Academic Field of Queer Studies

The concept of perverse presentism is often taught in Queer Studies classes at universities. This is the understanding that LGBT history cannot and should not be analyzed through contemporary perspectives.[24]

Queer Studies at non-U.S. Universities

Brazil

At Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) in Brazil there are many initiatives on Queers Studies. UFMG offers a multidisciplinary program on Gender and Sexuality for undergrad students: "Formação Transversal em Gênero e Sexualidade: Perspective Queer/LGBTI" (https://www.ufmg.br/prograd/). In its Faculty of Law, ranked amongst the best in the country, Professor Marcelo Maciel Ramos established in 2014 *Diverso UFMG - Legal Division of Gender and Sexual Diversity* (www.diversoufmg.com) and a study group on Gender, Sexuality and Law, which is now leaded also by Professor Pedro Nicoli. Diverso UFMG organizes since 2016 the Congress of Gender and Sexual Diversity (Congresso de Diversidade Sexual e de Gênero: www.congressodiverso.com) that has become one of the biggest and most important academic events on Women and LGBT studies in Brazil. At the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Professor Marco Aurélio Máximo Prado has been running since 2007 Nuh UFMG (Human Rights and LGBT Citizenship Division), a very successful initiative on LGBT studies (http://www.fafich.ufmg.br/nuh/).

The Transversal Training in Gender and Sexuality: A Queer / LGBTI Perspective as an objective to bring students closer to the theoretical-political-methodological contributions organized from the Queer / LGBTI experiences in the contemporary world, considering the transversality of this field of studies and political practices of this emergency. The "8th International Congress for Studies on Sexual Diversity and Gender" was hosted by the UFJF (Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora) on June 6.[25]

China

Fudan University, located in Shanghai, China opened the country’s first course on homosexuality and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) prevention in 2003 entitled “Homosexual Health Social Sciences.” In an article focusing on this college course, Gao and Gu utilize feedback from participants, detailed interviews with professors, and a review of course documents to discuss China’s first course with homosexuality at its core. Their article analyzes the tactics used to create such a course and the strategies used to protect the course from adverse reactions in the press. The authors especially take note of the effects of the course on its attendees and the wider gay community in China. The authors note that “Homosexual Health Social Sciences” was described as a “breakthrough” by South China Morning Post and Friends’ Correspondence, a periodical for gay health intervention. Surveys were given to attendees of the class and many responded that the class helped them understand the homosexual perspective better. One student stated that “Even if we cannot fully understand these people, we need to respect them. That is the basis for real communication.” Many of the course attendees admitted that the course changed their lives. One Chinese police officer had been hiding his sexuality his entire life stated “The course really enhanced my quality of life…” Another man who had been prescribed treatment for his homosexuality for 30 years heard talk of the course in a newspaper and expressed “This precious news has relieved my heart.”

“Homosexual Health Social Sciences” was developed to be interdisciplinary to cover the social sciences, humanities, and public health. Interdependence on different academic focuses was achieved in the curriculum by covering “Theories of homosexuality and Chinese reality”, “homosexual sub-culture” and “Men seeking men (MSM) intervention in human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention,” in addition to reading literature with gay characters and themes and taking field trips to a gay bar. The article goes on to

describe the attendance of this course and its significance by clarifying that the official registration in the class was low, with only one student in 2003 and two in 2004. Officially registered students were not the only people attending the classes though because the course was open to the general public. The average attendance in 2003 was 89.9 and rose to 114 in 2004.

Gao and Gu also reveal the precautions taken by the creators of the course to shelter the new class from harsh criticism. The authors depict the creators' fear of attracting too much negative attention from the Chinese media could adversely affect the course and its continuation. Most coverage on this course at Fudan University was delivered in English at the beginning. This phenomenon was explained by one journalist from China Radio International—Homosexuality is very sensitive issue in Chinese culture so by discussing it in English, it is distanced from the conservative Chinese culture. Fudan University led Chinese academia to develop more comprehensive curriculum that will educate future health care professionals on the needs of more Chinese citizens.[26]

See also

- Gender studies
- Group entity
- Disability studies
- Transgender studies
- Gender and Sexual Diversity

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External links

- College Equality Index
- University Queer Programs
- Undergraduate Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto
- The Rockway Institute for LGBT research in the public interest at Alliant International University
- The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
- Trikster - Nordic Queer Journal
- Lesbian and Gay Research in UK Universities and Colleges (compiled in 2006)
- LGBT Studies Minor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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